

SUPPORTING CARE LEAVERS IN FURTHER EDUCATION

**A GUIDE TO GOOD PRACTICE IN COLLEGES
ACHIEVING THE BUTTLE UK QUALITY MARK**

Full Report

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SUPPORTING CARE LEAVERS IN FURTHER EDUCATION: A GUIDE TO GOOD PRACTICE IN COLLEGES ACHIEVING THE BUTTLE UK QUALITY MARK

1. INTRODUCTION

[NIACE](#), the National Institute of Adult Continuing Education, has worked with Buttle UK to produce this good practice guide. The guide highlights the effective practice developed by colleges that achieved the Buttle UK Quality Mark for Care Leavers in the UK. The Quality Mark was originally established in Higher Education Institutions, following its launch in 2006. In recent years the Quality Mark has been developed and expanded into Further Education Colleges. Throughout the duration of the Quality Mark project, from 2006 - 2015, 112 Higher Education and 81 Further Education institutions achieved the Quality Mark.

NIACE is the National Institute of Adult Continuing Education, the national voice for lifelong learning. We are an internationally respected development organisation and think-tank, working on issues central to the economic renewal of the UK, particularly in the political economy, education and learning, public policy and regeneration fields.

NIACE's strategic objectives focus upon supporting and enabling young people and adults who have had the least chances in life to participate in and benefit from learning. We have developed a programme of work focused on young people who are looked after or who have left care. This includes [research into the Pathway Planning process](#), the development and dissemination of a care leavers' [voices](#) publication and the development of an app '[Inspire Me](#)' to help care leavers learn from their peers' experiences of leaving care.

[Buttle UK](#) is a grant-giving organisation which gives direct, practical help to children, young people and families living in poverty in the UK by providing a lifeline when they have nowhere else to turn. It was through this activity that the needs of care experienced young people accessing further and higher education came to their attention and the need for a Quality Mark was identified.

A [definition](#) of Looked after Young People and Care leavers (LAYP/CL) can be found here alongside a summary of relevant [policy](#) in each of the four UK nations.

[Statistics](#) highlight that young people who have been in local authority care achieve disproportionately poor outcomes at school, and in further and higher education, compared to their peers. However, NIACE's research and the experience of the Buttle UK Quality Mark demonstrates that with effective targeted support and encouragement, many care leavers do succeed in further education and progress to higher education with similar success. NIACE is working to ensure that all further education colleges develop and implement a comprehensive framework of support which will enable more care leavers to experience this kind of success and fulfil their potential.

There are [216 general FE colleges in England, 26 in Scotland, 16 in Wales and 6 in Northern Ireland](#), all of which will have young people looked after/leaving care amongst their students and potential students. There are approximately 10,000 young people leaving care at the age of 16-18 each year in England, 1,000 in Scotland, 500 in Wales and 270 in Northern Ireland. This represents a significant number of young people who, with the right support, will access post-16 learning, stay in learning and progress to employment, HE or apprenticeships.

The FE college principals and other staff who contributed to this guide were clear that supporting care leavers within their institutions is fundamentally a moral duty. It is integral to their equality and diversity policies and practice, their commitment to supporting 'vulnerable groups' and creating an inclusive learning environment which is accessible to all.

2. THE BUTTLE UK QUALITY MARK FRAMEWORK WITH ILLUSTRATIVE EXAMPLES

2.1 The purpose of the guide

The Buttle UK Quality Mark project ended in July 2015. This guide has been written to provide examples of good practice to help further education colleges effectively meet the needs of looked after children and care leavers. In-depth interviews with staff from colleges that achieved the Buttle UK Quality Mark in England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland were undertaken and a small number of case study visits were carried out. Interviews were held with members of college leadership teams, teaching and pastoral staff, and care leaver students themselves.

The examples of good practice included in this guide are all drawn from colleges which participated in this research. This is not an exhaustive list – it is a selection of good practice examples developed to encourage and enable further education colleges to reflect on and enhance their practice. It is hoped the examples will spark creative thinking for 'doing things differently' or adding to what is already a good support structure. The support that care leavers and looked after young people require should be continually reviewed and progressed in order to meet the changing needs of individual care leavers and changes to the education system.

2.2 Format

The format of this guide mirrors the [Buttle UK Quality Mark Framework](#), it includes examples, quotes and reflections from practitioners to enable colleges to take forward the good practice learned through the successful implementation of the Quality Mark.

This guide is accompanied by appendices. These are:

- Four exemplary case studies: An in-depth analysis of how colleges in each of the four nations, that achieved exemplary status through the Buttle UK Quality Mark, work to engage and support care leavers in learning.

- A collection of useful resources used by Buttle UK to help colleges follow the process of working towards a standard of provision that was required to gain the Quality Mark. These include:
 - [The Quality Mark Framework for FE](#)
 - [Questions asked as prompts by the Quality Mark Assessors for each element of the framework](#)
 - [Requirements for exemplary level practice by Quality Mark institutions](#)
 - [Project Plan Template](#)
 - [Statistical return for tracking and monitoring](#)

2.3 How to use this guide

Colleges are encouraged to use the illustrative examples within this guide to develop their own good practice and to share this practice with other education and training providers and partners with whom they work. The examples can form the basis of ongoing Continuing Professional Development for practitioners across the institutions, and colleges may wish to add to them with new examples of their own. They can also be used locally or regionally to support networks developing good practice for students leaving care or looked after young people. The criteria and associated good practice can also be used to support the development of relationships with local authorities/Health and Social Care Trusts and other key stakeholders who share an interest in helping to achieve positive outcomes for looked after young people.

2.4 Acknowledgements

NIACE and Buttle UK would like to thank all the colleges and local authorities who have contributed to this resource. In particular:

- Neath Port Talbot Group, Wales
- Hugh Baird College, Merseyside, England
- Glasgow Kelvin College, Scotland
- Dumfries and Galloway College, Scotland
- Belfast Metropolitan College, Northern Ireland
- Tony Clifford, Headteacher Virtual School Children in Care, Children and Young People's Services, City of Stoke on Trent

SUPPORTING CARE LEAVERS IN FURTHER EDUCATION: A GUIDE TO GOOD PRACTICE IN COLLEGES ACHIEVING THE BUTTLE UK QUALITY MARK

SECTION 1: RAISING ASPIRATIONS AND PRE-ENTRY OUTREACH

1.1. 'Develop effective links with local authorities/Health and Social Care Trusts and others to ensure that care experienced young people know about and can access FE provision'

- **Partnerships and networks are absolutely key**

For example, East Kent College and Wakefield College participate actively in regional groups of key stakeholders as do many other colleges. This both promotes good practice by sharing information and builds better relationships between educational institutions and with other key organisations – for example, local authorities, Health and Social Care Trusts and charities.

- **Data sharing protocols are crucial to success and to maintaining effective information exchanges across organisations and through changes of staff**

For example, Neath Port Talbot College (NPTC) Group regularly reviews and updates its protocol with the local authority; the time spent on this allows for an evaluation process on what works and makes sure that new staff are on board. Regular reviews mean that everyone concerned is reminded of its importance, this reinforces the close working relationship between all the key agencies.

- **A multi-agency approach for larger colleges**

Peterborough Regional College developed strong collaboration with local authorities and other organisations, supporting learners pre and post 16 with protocols/data sharing agreements. This included the ongoing identification of learners from looked-after backgrounds pre-application, entry and on-programme.

Derby College, one of the biggest colleges in England, attracts learners from Derbyshire, Nottinghamshire, Leicestershire and Staffordshire, requiring communication with all those local authorities and with other local stakeholders including local large employers. A multi-agency approach, including the work of the intervention team, is essential. The [designated person](#) was previously a multi-agency officer for the local authority and so brings into the role that deep knowledge of the other agencies locally which work with vulnerable young people and adults within Derby and Derbyshire. 'Key to our support for the learners here is that link with the external agencies' he said.

- **Good practice includes the work done prior to application, in schools and elsewhere including taster days and other outreach events**

At Forth Valley College staff visit schools, residential care homes, foster carers, and 'Throughcare' and 'Aftercare' services to share information on studying at the college and to answer any questions. The college has an extensive list of external contacts who work with looked after young people or care leavers (LAYP/CL) and uses these to promote the college's support.

- **A multi-media approach to provide information and raise awareness about extra support**

Websites and leaflets highlight that extra support is available for care leavers in many colleges. For example, Forth Valley College's Marketing Department has produced two information [leaflets](#) aimed specifically at LAYP/CL applicants and associated external contacts. These leaflets direct LAYP/CL applicants to support from Learner Advisers and provide a checklist of support available:

- Named staff member for care leavers
- Financial advice and support
- Information on our website for care leavers
- Priority processing for funding
- Pre-application help
- Help in organising childcare or transportation
- Guaranteed interview if entry requirements met
- Progression and career support

These leaflets are used at open days/evenings, for visits to schools and residential homes, and are given to external contacts at stakeholder meetings.

Many colleges have recognised that it is important to put clear and easily accessible information for young people with care experience on their websites ([Hugh Baird College](#), [NPTC Group](#) and [Northbrook College](#)). This also enables foster carers and other key professionals to look at the same information as the young people in their care and play a role in encouraging their participation, reassuring them or checking they have understood the support on offer.

There is further support available from The Who Cares? Trust who have published handbooks for FE and HE: An HE handbook for care leavers in [England](#) and [Scotland](#); an [FE Handbook for Scotland](#); and a [joint FE and HE Handbook for Wales](#).

The Who Cares? Trust is currently working on a new [online version of a UK wide Handbook](#) which will be available in autumn 2015.

- **Promoting and running additional outreach activities to ease transition**

Forth Valley College runs a summer school, to ease the transition to study at college, allowing potential students to meet other students in similar situations and get to know their key workers in college. This helps to bridge the gap for those who are or have been in the care system between leaving school and going to college, and engages potential students in positive activity over the summer, which can prove a

difficult time for some looked after young people as there may be little structure or positive activity in their life once school is over. The summer school is 'sold' on the basis that it may increase a potential student's likelihood of their being accepted onto the college course they would like to attend. It consists of team building activities and tasters, a chance to meet college staff and familiarise themselves with the college buildings and facilities, and check out what support is available.

Many Colleges run special taster days or even longer programmes (such as Neath Port Talbot College Group / Belfast Metropolitan College / Telford College of Arts and Technology (TCAT)). Some colleges have run taster days tailored for one individual or a small group to ensure that all potential students will be ready to start with the others at the beginning of term. Some colleges organise meetings with schools, carers and other professionals as well as with the potential student; these may happen before or after the summer schools or taster days.

- **Peer mentoring**

'We refer each other to the student support team. Like if we find out that there's another student in our position we send them to talk to the team.'

Many colleges have found that young people from a care background can be very effective mentors for others. In some areas, looked after young people may already know each other as they may meet in other forums or from school, so can help encourage others into college, and support them while there.

- **Student involvement / Learner voice**

Involving foster carers and social workers in outreach activity is important - and often previous students from a care background are included in the outreach or summer school activity, as role models and to encourage participation. This learner voice is often more effective than anything the college staff can say.

'Being in care, though seen as a bad thing by a lot of people, has opened so many doors for me.'

NPTC Group and Glasgow Kelvin College are clear about the importance of placing the experience of the care leaver/looked after young person at the centre of the activity and in ensuring that their voice is heard. Building a relationship of trust, based on mutual respect, is paramount. Young people are often involved in planning their college experiences as well as feeding back; taster workshops and away days can help with this.

- **Colleges recognise the importance of an approach which meets the student's needs in a personalised way – supporting anonymity**

'I don't want to stand out or be treated differently - so I don't want to have to be called out to a meeting during class time.'

'I didn't like to tell anyone I was in care, maybe if I did tell people then I might have found making friends harder.'

Some young people need travel expenses, to attend taster days for example, so a good understanding of the support required across the board is needed. At the NPTC Group this awareness is developed from the good relationship with the local authority and other key players, both to avoid double funding and use college or other resources in the most effective way, whilst ensuring that the care leavers in receipt of financial support are not able to be identified by other students. At some colleges, including Hugh Baird College, bursaries and entitlements are loaded onto a card - so that all students are having the same kind of card swiped at cafeteria tills.

- **Partnership approaches to target the hardest to reach young people**

In South Wales, the NPTC Group works in partnership with the local leaving care team and other partners. This has enabled the college to ensure that young people in and out of care have opportunities to engage with and access opportunities at the college, particularly those that are hard to reach or 'NEET'- not in education, employment or training. Together the partnership actively promotes visits to the college, tasters, and also activities such as a Learner Voice day and induction events. These may be held off site to encourage participation in a non-threatening location. The college works closely with the local Youth Service to engage those young people that have disengaged from mainstream education and taster sessions are arranged to actively re-engage them. Amongst these learners are looked after children whose personal circumstances have had an impact on attendance and engagement within the mainstream education setting.

- **Provision of impartial advice and guidance**

The NPTC Group's Learner Services Team work closely with the [designated person](#) and Social Services to ensure that young people get all the advice and guidance they need, and the Designated Person arranges specialist advice from internal staff and external partners when needed. In addition, Careers Wales have staff based at the college who work closely with the Designated Person to ensure that young people from this cohort have access to impartial advice and guidance.

1.2. 'Develop effective links with local authorities / Health and Social Care Trusts to ensure that data and information is shared effectively with students, potential students and their supporters and carer'

- **A robust system for information sharing within partnerships**

Derby College maintains a robust system with Derby City Council for vulnerable learners including care leavers, holding monthly learner meetings with a representative from the local authority multi-agency team, where information is shared about how the learners are progressing and what support has been put in place outside of the college. The emphasis is on ensuring learners are happy at college, achieving their potential and being able to achieve and progress beyond the college. The college also holds separate meetings within the college, with the learner present - especially if the learner needs extra support. The college also works to ensure that packages of support are in place to enable the learner to stay at the college. This can include transport arrangements, ensuring that the learner has the opportunity to get extra support - pastoral or academic.

- **Replacing negative, stereotypical language with sensitive and proactive language**

Hugh Baird College gathers all the necessary support information at the same time as enrolment, providing learners with help to complete forms if needed. Rather than use terms like 'vulnerable bursary', the college has developed its own scheme the 'Individual Costing Action Plan' or ICAP - and all the support flows through this. At the same time a key member of staff is allocated to each student through the ICAP scheme - and this also helps to avoid drawing further attention to the looked after young person later in the process - because they have already met this person separately and know it is them that they can contact.

- **A support team of staff who are easily identified, accessible and have varied responsibilities**

'My personal tutor is great but even more important are the [student support team] - without them I wouldn't still be coming to college.'

At NPTC Group finance staff and other support staff are all seen as part of the 'team' working with care leavers and looked after young people. This is also true at West Highland College UHI (University of the Highlands and Islands), where the student support services are immediately accessible near the front door of the college. Again this means that students can quickly access support, and because this support is not specified, and finance or support staff are needed by all students, their status is not revealed by them seeking support in those spaces.

Many colleges mentioned the importance of the clear identification of all staff so that students know who to ask for help as soon as they start at college. Typically, colleges use an information leaflet and then repeat that information on college walls and notice boards using the same staff photographs and colours. These staff, who will previously have met the students from care backgrounds, can then 'hover' on enrolment day and can be seen by the student without having to acknowledge that they have met before.

Different approaches might also be needed; for example, if most sixth form attendance is at the same college as the FE provision, such as at NPTC Group, or where high numbers of students are attracted from well outside the immediate local authority area such as at Sheffield College, then information and outreach has to be adapted.

- **Scotland – Community Engagement Groups**

The West Highland College UHI has developed a strong collaborative partnership with the Highland Council's Resource Manager for Looked After Children, and in particular with Barnardo's Scotland, Lifestyles and Action for Children in order to establish provision and support to reduce the number of young people between 16-19 who are NEET. Some voluntary organisations and other providers are based in the college's main building. Further working partnership agreements are in place between all 9 High Schools within Lochaber and Skye and Wester Ross catchment areas. These are managed by Learning Centre Managers locally and the Student

Services Manager at West Highland College UHI. Here, Community Engagement Groups exist in each college location, to act as a representative body from the local community, to strengthen community links and inform college provision, as well as raising awareness of college activities to a wider range of stakeholders including employers.

- **England - The role of Virtual Schools**

In England, [Virtual Schools](#) can play an effective role and one example of this is the Staffordshire / Stoke on Trent FE Network for looked after children. The Virtual Schools have spearheaded this network, with termly meetings where knowledge can be shared - what is going on in both schools and colleges around looked after children, as well as information sharing about changes in legislation, behaviour, education and other policy arenas. This enables draft protocols to be put in place and ensures that information gets out to looked after children; everyone is thus focused on the looked after young person or the young person making the transition from care. All of the colleges in the area implement this [protocol](#).

1.3. 'Effectively publicise the support the institution offers to potential students with a care background, their carers and those colleagues in local authorities/Health and Social Care Trusts, residential homes, schools and other organisations who are supporting them in their educational progression'

- **Including local authorities as parents**

Peterborough College holds a 'Welcome to Peterborough Regional College' event, to ensure the right support is given from the outset. This event is for local authorities, foster parents, carers and the young people to provide information and raise aspirations. It incorporates support with applications, IAG/study/career progression information, transition and on-programme support, services available, key college contacts and help with completing applications for bursary. The calendar of enrichment activities and parent evening letters are sent to local authorities to ensure everyone is aware of these events.

At West Highland College, when a young person discloses that they are from a cared for background an appointment is made to meet immediately with an information and guidance officer. This meeting will provide specific information on courses in order to enable the young person to make informed decisions and aid applications for entry to and progression to study options at FE/HE level. For looked after or care leaving students who make such appointments, follow up phone calls are made to confirm their understanding of the points covered and to assess if any other information or support is required for the student to be able to make an informed choice.

- **Clear and accessible information on website**

Some colleges have clear and accessible information for carers and looked after young people on their website. [Hugh Baird College](#), [NPTC Group](#) and [Northbrook College](#) all have this kind of link, for example. The website should include the name and contact detail of the designated member of staff so that care leavers, local

authorities, foster carers, etc, know who to contact for advice and information. This ensures that the young people can gain access to information without declaring their status or that those who support them can also find out more. As well as showing the kinds of support that care leavers can expect and ensuring that they know they are welcome at the college, it is also made clear that care leavers know that their details will not be disclosed without their permission.

SECTION 2: APPLICATION, ENTRY AND INDUCTION

2.1 'Identify a designated member of staff to act as a key point of contact and advisor for children and young people in care / care leavers to provide support prior to and on entry. Ensure the contact details for the designated member of staff are easily accessible'

'The fact that I can go and talk to [designated person] at any time is really important - she has become a really important person for me. She showed me around the college before I started and she is my main link person.'

▪ **The role of the designated member of staff – different approaches**

The role of the designated member of staff within the college varies; some have a curriculum manager, others a senior member of the support staff, such as the senior safeguarding officer or the senior learning support manager. The role the designated member of staff plays also depends on which of the four UK nations they are working in. While all colleges interviewed have a designated member of staff it is interesting to note the different roles, status and job titles of the person. Some providers have student support teams that cover a range of areas and students are allocated one named worker who they can seek out first, but others are also there in the event that the named person is unavailable. Hugh Baird College for example, has a range of people supporting students entitled to bursaries which forms the entry point for their access to support. Care leavers/looked after young people are met before they start their course. The people they have met from student support are clearly visible on enrolment day, but do not approach the young people directly.

Other good examples of how the student support team works as a whole can be found in many colleges including Telford College of Arts and Technology (TCAT) and [Neath Port Talbot College](#) (NPTC) Group.

At Northbrook College, students are introduced very early in the year to the designated member of staff. She emails care leavers/looked after young people, letting them know who she is and what she can offer, stressing that she will not 'push herself on to them' but is there to help if they need it. She believes that if you try to overdevelop the relationship then the learners back away. Students with care experience want to be perceived as 'just the same', they want to get on with their lives, gain qualifications, get to work and get a home; they want to 'start their lives'. Northbrook has all the support mechanisms in place and highlights them but the college does not draw attention to the learners - and doesn't make assumptions about them.

'If you talk to someone you feel like a weight's been lifted off your shoulders.'

2.2. 'Have in place methods of identifying applicants from care and establish contact with them as appropriate'

- **Begin to identify well in advance of application, encouraging disclosure**

As far as possible colleges try to work well in advance of application to identify and support possible care leavers intending to attend college the following year. At South Staffordshire College for example, the FE Network is vital in helping to identify applicants from care beforehand. Most of this is illustrated in the sections above, but there are some issues which still emerge at enrolment or even well after, especially where a care leaver arrives at the college from out of area, or does not claim any support. The right of a student not to disclose their status is paramount. If someone has not disclosed the issue may emerge at the point where a student either has some difficulties or is apparently unable to attend part of the course, such as a trip, or when a financial need is disclosed.

Hugh Baird College and NPTC Group, for example, work hard in the run-up to enrolment to ensure that application forms are fully completed by all students so that any students who might need extra support are able to be reassured. Many students need support in completing the form, particularly in understanding the implications of disclosing or not disclosing information.

2.3. 'Ensure information on the full range of support offered to applicants, their carers and professionals supporting them is readily available and easily accessible (financial, welfare and accommodation, academic) e.g. via dedicated website pages, leaflets, etc'

'I need to know about extra help that's available.'

- **Potential for referral to support from any contact students make**

Communications across college need to be developed so that there are potential referral points from all contacts the students have. Hugh Baird College believes that care leavers themselves guide the process for support, and so the process must begin with any member of staff that a care leaver/looked after young person chooses to talk to.

- **Regular reminders of support available for students and staff**

West Highland College UHI offer their support through a comprehensive set of opportunities for students. Drop in sessions are available for all students and individual appointments are made with the Student Services Team to discuss funding options and any concerns of a financial nature prior to their course start date and throughout the student journey. Looked after young people and care leaver students are reminded of the date and time of their appointment by text message the day before the appointment. All students are sent letters and information leaflets advising of the process for applying for funding and dates of pre course drop in sessions. Pre induction, individual interviews and information leaflets are made available. Signage and posters are available in libraries/cafes/student areas in all college centres. Information is included in the student handbook. One to one

surgeries with the Funding Officer are held for one month after courses start and are advertised throughout the college. The Funding Team is placed within the Student Services Office and is available at all times for students to drop in. Regular reminders are made of support available through the college social media sites. College staff are made aware during staff development sessions of the support available to students from a care background. The college has produced a useful flowchart which sets out what needs to be done at each stage of the [learner's journey](#).

2.4. 'When determining the support needs for applicants, ensure that the individual's circumstances are reflected in the support offered'

'I feel that I have always got someone to talk to in college if I'm not feeling ok and I know that I won't be judged'

To meet this criteria, colleges are guided mainly by the regulations in place in the particular nation/region or locality. In England this is largely done through bursary assessments, which are usually undertaken at the same time as recruitment. In Scotland, NI and Wales students can claim an educational maintenance allowance (EMA) and some colleges have access through special funds to be able to offer top ups, or through funding for a particular project to support looked after young people.

There is always a relationship between bursary and attendance/attainment so all students in receipt of bursaries are monitored. At Derby College, for example, the support teams become involved if attendance drops below a level deemed acceptable, but the approach to rectifying the problem is tailored to meet the individual needs of the care leaving student, rather than moving quickly to disciplinary. Individual support is essential. One young person who had recently left care spoke about difficulties managing her money. She didn't have enough money to pay for bus fare to the college. Through discussion with the designated member of staff she was directed to a short course on money management at the college and provided with emergency funds in the short term.

Most colleges support care leaver students to be able to claim their allowances and find ways of administering it in flexible ways, that meet the individual's needs. This can include, for example, dividing the bursary into smaller amounts and paying it weekly rather than monthly, to help with budgeting. Travel costs are often directly funded.

2.5. 'Where appropriate offer flexible application arrangements e.g. interview guarantees, activities to keep students engaged with the college until the start of their course, flexible intake dates for courses'

- **Guaranteed places**

At Peterborough College, all applicants are offered an interview and the guarantee that a suitable course will be found for them, if not internally, then through an outward referral to another provider.

- **Timing and summer programmes**

The timing of courses is important. Sheffield and Peterborough Colleges have roll-on roll off programmes and many colleges offer January intakes, while some colleges offer summer programmes (such as Forth Valley College and West Highland College). Some colleges offer early interviews as part of their support to care leaving students and also summer programmes or tasters, which can help students to stay involved and motivated before the start of college term.

- **Pre-entry steps in**

Offers to students/potential students include signposting to other providers of pre-entry programmes or to the college's own programmes. For example, Sheffield College works very closely with Connexions so that looked after young people can be tracked across all the systems, in an effort to ensure that all care leavers have a course place.

2.6. 'Offer transition support before the course starts to help students and their carers feel comfortable with the institution e.g. visits to the college, meeting of staff from support services and academic tutors pre-course'

- **Partnership work to help make choices**

East Kent College reports that transition support through the summer is really important. This is carried out by full time support staff who are committed to building relationships with all the relevant external agencies.

Sheffield College works closely with Connexions so that potential students can gain access to the full offer of advice and guidance to help them make informed choices.

- **An intensive transitions programme**

Glasgow Kelvin College offers a 'Transitions to Learning and Work' programme for learners referred through local authority partners including Glasgow City Council Social Work Services and local schools. This intensive programme provides youth work style learning activities which develop the capacity of young people to work together and to learn, as well as introductory vocational experiences. Learners are supported by both teaching staff and Youth Workers based on the Curriculum for Excellence reforms and the programme is funded by the Big Lottery.

2.7. 'On enrolment ensure that students and staff are supported to ensure that the college experience is positive for care experienced young people and that their needs are met'

- **A dialogue between support and academic staff, providing awareness training**

Like most colleges, Derby College works hard to identify care experienced young people before enrolment. Once the young person does arrive the college builds a dialogue between the intervention team and the academic staff. Providing they give their consent, every care experienced learner is allocated a personal coach

and a named member of the academic staff in the appropriate curriculum area, where the young person is studying.

Training is offered specifically for tutors and those with pastoral care responsibilities at Peterborough Regional College; others, such as Dumfries and Galloway College, offer the support teams awareness training. In general, however, colleges tend to have involved their specialist staff in enrolling and interviewing looked after young people, in advance of the main enrolment days.

Glasgow Kelvin College suggests that learners may need intense support at the beginning and it is worthwhile investing this time at the outset to minimise the risk of later withdrawals or a sense of failure on the part of the learner. The college is clear that it is worth spending as much time as possible with the learner to give them a full college experience.

- **Supporting non-disclosure, making sure ALL students' practical needs are met before starting courses**

'I just want to be the same as other students.'

Some colleges specifically consider a young person's right to non-disclosure - not all care leavers / looked after young people choose to disclose their status, for a range of reasons. Northbrook College insists that it is part of the job of the support staff to ensure that all learners know who to turn to when they need extra support.

At NPTC Group the college support staff ensure that finances are provided for all aspects of a programme. For example, for university visits; sometimes the local authority has a budget for this type of activity, so the importance of working in partnership cannot be over-stressed. Support staff check to ensure that the right budget is being used to support the range of kit and activities the young person needs. Again the focus is on making sure the looked after/care leaving students are not singled out and can carry out activities with their peers.

At Hugh Baird College, the support staff ensure that the student has all the kit they need (tools, protective clothing etc) before the course starts so that they can start on the same day, with the other students.

- **In-kind support such as vouchers, spreading out payments**

Peterborough Regional College states that:

'We continually look for ways to remove barriers so we provide 'in kind support' such as luncheon vouchers and local transport vouchers. Another positive impact are the payments made for the vulnerable bursary. We have tailored these payments to meet the needs of the students. For example, we now make weekly payments throughout the academic year (44 weeks rather than 36 weeks) this prevents financial barriers when returning to study after the half term breaks.'

- **Different approaches to financial support for childcare**

The four nations have slightly different approaches to financial support for childcare. For example in Scotland, at Forth Valley College, looked after young people and care leavers on both FE and HE courses can receive childcare support paid from discretionary funds. Lone parents are awarded 100% of their childcare costs. Students who have a partner will have their costs of childcare means-tested against their household income. Care leaving students will receive information on childcare assistance via e-mail, specific leaflets, through Learner Adviser support, summer school sessions, induction, website and their course handbook.

- **Quick intervention in crisis is key – keeping an open door**

At the NPTC Group, students are encouraged to approach support staff if there are difficulties, or academic staff or personal mentors, if they prefer. The importance of quick intervention is emphasised by East Kent, Sheffield and Peterborough Colleges. Two key points are made: every attempt will be made to ensure the young person can continue to attend college unless it becomes too difficult for them and that secondly the colleges ensure the young people know that, even if they have to withdraw in extreme personal circumstances, they can return to try again the following year.

SECTION 3: ONGOING SUPPORT

3.1. 'A designated member of staff to act as a key point of contact and advisor throughout the duration of the student's course'

- **Single points of contact for management and practical support**

At Belfast Metropolitan College, the Head of Student Support is the single point of contact within the college for the management of queries into the progression of young people from a care background. This post is supported by a learning support officer assigned to care leavers, who is the single point of contact in terms of the operational support and guidance to care experienced students.

- **Single point of contact within a support team**

[Hugh Baird College's](#) cross-college support team and its links with support for other 'vulnerable' or potentially disadvantaged students helps to ensure that there is always one key contact point for learners, with cover if they should not be available.

- **A Learner Adviser**

At Forth Valley College there is a Learner Adviser in each campus, on a duty rota, to support looked after young students with any issues they may encounter while studying at the college such as finance, accommodation, transport, childcare, counselling service referral and signposting to external agencies and partners. The advisors also give advice on progression routes and pre-exit strategies. This is advertised through websites, leaflets, summer school, induction, course handbooks and is shared with all external contacts.

- **Organise regular contact with support staff and pastoral support**

East Kent College organises regular contact between support staff and care leavers. Northbrook College places importance on the role of the pastoral learning mentor. Glasgow Kelvin College approaches pastoral support informally and a relationship of trust is established; 'if they need something specific we try to do that for them', and the impact of this is that young people do stay in touch even when they have left the college.

*'Working towards my degree has been a bit up and down. I had to start again. But, I've just heard that I'm on track for getting a first.'**

*A former FE student with care experience, who keeps in contact with her college.

- **In large colleges, ensure all campuses are covered**

Both Hugh Baird College and Neath Port Talbot College (NPTC) Group have a support team approach but with clear leadership. At NPTC Group there are campuses across more than one geographical area and therefore there is a deputy designated person in one part of Wales, while the lead role is based at the main campus further south.

- **Adapt systems according to the needs of individuals**

An awareness of different care backgrounds is vital in helping practitioners to have a clearer understanding of care leavers' life circumstances. As well as young people coming through the care system in its various guises, different issues may face young people arriving as unaccompanied minors from other countries and this requires the adaptation of support systems accordingly.

'My recommendation to other colleges is... have all the support mechanisms in place but don't draw attention to the learners - and don't make assumptions about the learners - it's not always a struggle to keep them in college.'

3.2. 'Financial support for the learner is in place throughout their time at college and includes support for progression and the student's continuing learning post-19'

- **Work with local authority staff to negotiate financial support**

East Kent College stresses the need for close working relationships with the staff of partners and NPTC Group found that negotiation with social workers about the provision of financial support was helpful.

- **Quick access to vulnerable learners bursary**

Northbrook College recommends that the bursaries should be well-organised, and put into place very quickly; students getting access to money is key to the young person attending college; colleges report that for some it is the bursary that persuades them to stay in education; without the bursary, they could not consider a college place. Financial issues put a real pressure on care experienced (and other) young people to get a job as soon as possible - sometimes because they would like to gain greater independence and have control over their lives.

- **Resolving accommodation difficulties on transition to HE**

It is important to ensure that any gaps in support are covered, such as through the holiday periods, as this can help ensure that students return to college to complete their courses. Wakefield College and other institutions in the West Yorkshire network have found that providing lockable storage for some students can make a big difference if the students have nowhere safe to store their belongings. A potentially difficult time for students who are progressing to HE can be the summer before they start their university course - they may not have adequate housing during this time.

- **Addressing key 'flash points' and 'pressure points'**

Belfast Metropolitan College tries to ensure additional support from the key worker at any key 'flash points', such as the return from holidays. Others identify that support is needed around assessment times and other pressure points. Some colleges pay travel expenses through purchasing bus passes so that transport costs can be covered. At NPTC Group's most northern campus, all activities have to conclude before the final bus of the day (at 4pm). Looked after young people/care leavers may be particularly vulnerable to transport problems as they lack other support or may be unfamiliar with local geography.

Telford College of Arts and Technology (TCAT) offers post-19 support to care leavers who were not disclosing; the college looked for information to identify young people as care leavers from MIS data. They ensure that the application and enrolment forms have a box to tick that shows if anyone is coming from a care experience background. This still does not identify those who choose not to disclose information but it has improved the college's work with care leavers.

3.3. 'With the consent of the learner, agree a protocol for the sharing of information with the learner and the responsible local authority / Health and Social Care Trust, including continuing contribution to the [Pathway Plan](#)'

- **Form a proactive working relationship with the local authority**

Belfast Metropolitan College developed a proactive working relationship with the Belfast Trust in support of their students from a care background. The Trust and the College have regular meetings to review the educational pathways of young people from a care background.

One crucial success for NPTC Group has been continuity - many of the relevant staff in the local authority and elsewhere have been working with the college for some time and know each other well. It is clear that college staff are able to follow up with known social workers, and are able to avoid the delays that would have occurred previously - this makes for successful interventions.

3.4. 'Provide academic support where required'

- **To ensure clarity about support available, avoid jargon**

All students should be able to access academic support, but some need extra input from the outset; best practice ensures that every student, including those from care leaving backgrounds, are aware of what academic support is and how to access it. TCAT stressed the importance of making sure that support is offered in language that students and their supporters/carers are able to understand, avoiding learning and skills sector jargon.

For some colleges weekly contact seems to work best but others find it more effective to meet less frequently unless the young person seeks out support to meet a specific need, such as completing an assignment.

- **Extra funding for a pre-entry course**

Many colleges, such as Glasgow Kelvin College and Dumfries and Galloway College, have gained extra funding to provide a pre-entry course covering typically one year of basic study – such as study skills, literacy and numeracy as well as a wide range of other programme offers and tasters. This usually includes some community or outdoor experience which is not classroom based. These courses support those who missed out on education and need to gain a basis from which a college mainstream programme might be accessed.

- **Assurance in a crisis – emotional support**

Key support might be needed around difficult moments; one college reported how a student, who was a care leaver and was unable to cope, was supported to continue and achieve.

'I had to give bad news to one care leaving student about his test results - he had not quite made the pass mark - and he went charging out of the room. But, because we were briefed and knew that he might find this difficult, we got in touch with him immediately to explain that he could take the test again and that extra learning support could be on offer to help him to prepare. So he came back to college, took some extra lessons and passed with flying colours the next time. He just needed that extra bit of support. But it's more important just to keep letting them know that we are not giving up on them.'

- **A LAYP/CL strategy to raise success and attendance rates**

Peterborough Regional College has a Looked After Children and Care Leavers (LAYP/CL) strategy to continue to raise learner success rates, raise learner outcomes and progression rates into FE, HE and employment and to widen participation through providing high quality student support mechanisms. The College monitors the attendance of the LAYP/CL and this has helped improve the attendance rates by 10%. A weekly attendance report goes to the local authorities/social workers/personal advisers who will make contact with the young person if attendance is low and arrange a meeting to discuss this and action support if required.

- **Vital enrichment courses to support independent living**

Peterborough Regional College arranges termly meetings with local authorities working closely with the corporate parents. These have enabled the college to develop and implement smarter strategies and ways of working including the setting up of the weekly attendance monitoring. The need for additional support was recognised in these meetings and has led to enrichment activities being designed specifically for the needs of these students, for example, a basic cookery course for unaccompanied minors to support independent living.

- **Small groups, youth and community work approach**

Glasgow Kelvin College staff believe that the college achieves good results with students with care experience through a person-centred, individualised approach

within a group/classroom of 5 or 6. This is based on a youth and community work ethos, which promotes confidence, self-worth and decision making within a specifically tailored year long programme. This model works for those students who can't go straight onto mainstream courses. The course consists of three blocks the first of which is based on study skills and getting used to college life - but it is not taught in a traditional or formal way. The second and third blocks mainly consist of tasters. This programme is currently funded by Big Lottery and the aim is to mainstream this provision at the end of the funding. Students can then progress over time to other college programmes.

- **Mentors acting as 'go-betweens'**

At Northbrook College the pastoral learning mentor can also help if the looked after young person needs to talk to the academic staff about anything. The student is not always able to articulate their needs clearly and so the mentor can be a 'go-between' between the tutor/teaching staff to make sure that any support needs are met.

- **Embedded language learning**

Peterborough Regional College has adopted an embedded ESOL approach for young unaccompanied people who are refugees; they have found that learning English works much more effectively if it is embedded into a vocational area such as Motor Vehicle courses, in which the young people are keen to participate.

3.5. 'Ensure students have access to pastoral support'

- **Supporting and responding to mental health difficulties**

'I enrolled at college. My behaviour was erratic. I used to do my work and then screw it up and put in in the bin. I did this because at school I wasn't good enough. This got worse as the course went on.'

At East Kent College many care leavers have been identified as experiencing mental health difficulties, including depression and anxiety. Difficulties may emerge before the start of the programme, but often come to light later, and the college response relies on access to effective and quick referral routes.

To properly support looked after and care leaving students, East Kent College has excellent relationships with external agencies, and it is by working together that they can arrive at solutions to support the young person most effectively. College support staff are critical to successful support, especially during the transition period.

- **Personal Education Plans (PEPs) set up by support staff who attend review meetings - progression mentors appointed**

East Kent College believes it is not realistic to separate academic and personal support, so the support staff set up the Personal Education Plan (PEP) and attend PEP review meetings. However, all vulnerable students also have a progression mentor and some students prefer to work through and attend the PEP review with their mentor.

- **Addressing external factors such as hunger and poverty**

'It's really important to me that we can get food here - it means that I don't have to worry about that too.'

East Kent College maintains a risk register of vulnerable students, overseen by a Vice-Principal and looked after young people clearly fall into this category. There are termly meetings with all relevant staff. The college now runs a college campus food bank to help address issues of poverty, which is particularly helpful for young parents or others living independently who struggle financially.

3.6. 'Where required, support students in need of emergency or long-term accommodation'

- **Accommodate impact of life issues, such as young parenthood/independent living**

Colleges may need to factor in the impact of independent living and / or young parenthood which can characterise the lives of some care leavers. Hugh Baird College is mindful of this when arranging timetables and activities, while Belfast Metropolitan College and Forth Valley College offer referrals to housing support. Hugh Baird College reported a particular time of difficulty being the end of the second year of college, when a student is leaving but cannot yet take up other accommodation; having nowhere to store belongings is just one of the many problems if the only accommodation available is a hostel.

To support independent living Peterborough College organises cookery classes, particularly useful for those at distance from any support networks.

3.7. 'Provide impartial progression guidance relating to further study (e.g. FE to HE), or progression routes into employment and where relevant offer transition support'

- **Progressing to Apprenticeships within the same institution**

Northbrook College believes that the longer young people can stay in education the better it is likely to be for them and the more success they are likely to have in all aspects of their lives. They will learn skills for the world of work and learn how to get on with different people. At the College, one option is progression into Apprenticeships, such as Hair and Beauty, Early Years, Health and Social Care, Construction and Motor Vehicle. Northbrook reports that some care leavers do progress to university, but the majority are keen to gain employment and therefore independence as soon as they can.

- **A solid relationship with the local IAG provider is important**

While all colleges have and make good use of their internal guidance and advice staff, a solid relationship with the local careers/guidance services is vital. For example, Sheffield College has a very close relationship with the Connexions service

locally which enables joint tracking of care leavers and instant referral so that no-one gets lost in the system.

- **Hold progression meetings with relevant stakeholders**

East Kent College sees its internal information, advice and guidance provision as absolutely critical in supporting the progression of young care leavers. This is supported through strong ongoing contact with all networks and results in positive outcomes for care leavers. Progression meetings are held with relevant stakeholders.

SECTION 4: MONITORING OUTCOMES AND IMPACT

4.1. 'The college Principal endorses a college-wide strategy to support students from care and the development of the college's provision for this cohort. Looked after young people/care leaver (LAYP/CL) policy, retention strategy, awareness and culture of whole college, high expectation of students'

'The college recognises that it has a key social responsibility to support care experienced learners in order to work with them to achieve their aspirations and goals. At Glasgow Kelvin College this involves effective partnership working to provide learners with the opportunity to gain the skills which are required for employment and further learning while developing the self-confidence needed to engage meaningfully within their community.'

Alan Sherry, Principal, Glasgow Kelvin College

▪ **A whole institution strategy, robust structures for monitoring and evaluation**

As well as endorsement by the Principal for a college-wide strategy, it is important that all staff within a college are aware of the challenges faced by young people in care/care leavers and what kind of support will help, from the Principal, to managers, teachers, support staff and staff responsible for buildings and premises. This can be promoted by strategies and policies, such as Widening Participation Strategies, but also strategies that have care-experience as the main focus. Robust methods of monitoring and evaluating the impact of those strategies and the interventions put in place are crucial in terms of reviewing success and identifying impact on learner retention and achievement.

▪ **A passion at senior level about meeting care leavers' needs is a key driver**

At East Kent College a key driver is the Principal who is passionate about supporting and meeting the needs of this group of students, as well as other vulnerable groups. He chairs a steering group in the county called the Care Leavers Progression Partnership (CLPP). This group also has links to the other Kent colleges and universities, virtual schools heads across Kent and Medway, third sector organisations such as Catch-22, Jobcentre Plus and a range of other stakeholders.

4.2. 'A senior member of staff oversees the implementation and monitoring of the commitment across the institution'

Staff at all levels within a college require active support from senior management. It is important for key messages and guidance about inclusion and diversity to be

clearly communicated to all staff, from the very top of the organisation. Active support from senior management - frequently at assistant principal or assistant director level - can add considerable weight to an initiative to support care leavers.

4.3. 'Collect data for this specific cohort on application, on enrolment and on course and establish processes to measure retention and success of students from care and review regularly'

- **The type of data to collect**

As part of the Buttle UK Quality Mark process, data was collected via an [annual statistical return](#) submitted by award-holding HE and FE institutions. This gives a clear indication of the types of data that are useful to collect and illustrates the characteristics of the young people being supported and what support is being provided.

- **Processes for measuring retention and success**

Colleges which have flagged students with care experience within their mainstream data rely on this for measuring retention and success, but the frequency of monitoring of individual young people is usually increased. This monitoring is either fed back at regular meetings with the learner, or, if anything unusual arises (a sudden drop of grades for example) this would trigger a meeting with support staff. Otherwise colleges rely on good relationships between key support staff and young people.

- **Collect data on enrolment**

At [Belfast Metropolitan College](#) staff are constantly striving to improve methods for capturing data to ensure that there is an accurate picture of the students and their requirements. This means that there is support to positively encourage students to 'tick the box' on the application and enrolment forms and to request help. By ticking the box the student is flagged to the Learning Support Officer assigned to care leavers for additional guidance and support provision. 'If we don't know you are there, we cannot help you' is part of the outreach and workshop campaign.

Similarly, at Hugh Baird College care experienced learners are encouraged to declare this at enrolment resulting in continued support:

'The college enrolment form has been amended in order that Looked After Children or Care Leavers tick a box to declare their status, and sign to consent to the information being shared with relevant key team members. This is then communicated to the Retention and Progression Co-ordinators, and the contact is then established with the student, who will be monitored and supported for the duration of their course.'

- **Tracking and setting targets improves outcomes**

Uxbridge College has improved its data collection processes and can therefore report more effectively on progression data at the end of every year; a report is made to the governors' meetings. The college would like to see more young people

from a care background progressing to university, but at the moment this cohort is not achieving outcomes comparable with other students. There is a recognition that achievement of higher levels of learning may take longer, as a result of care leavers' disrupted experiences of schooling. What the College perceives to be important though, is that they are now able to track and set targets. This is vital in improving outcomes for care leavers.

The [Virtual School in Stoke-on-Trent](#) has developed a 16-19 Young People in Care and Care Leaver Learner Support Agreement. The Virtual School in Stoke recognised the need to develop a more formal agreement between providers - FE and training providers - social care, careers and the Virtual School itself, in order to ensure joined up support for young people in care as they moved to Post 16.

The Stoke Learner Support Agreement has been developed with Stoke's Virtual School partners since 2012 and all their providers in Stoke (FE, VI Form and training providers) have signed up to it. It has been so successful that it is now being developed as a West Midlands document by 5 local authorities. This approach has improved education, training and employment outcomes in Stoke by 15% and it has prevented any young person being universally removed from provision for over three years now.

4.4. 'Measure outcomes of improved support within the college and the impact on student success and have in place reporting procedures to their senior team as part of the college's regular reporting cycle, as well as Governors or Board meetings. The outcomes are also included in reports to external inspectorates, such as Ofsted'

Following the collection of data on numbers enrolling and achievements for care leavers, Ofsted were able to identify good outcomes specifically for care leavers at East Kent College:

'A large number of young people either in the care of or having left the care of local authorities attend the college. They achieve qualification successes above the national average for young people in care.'

April 2013

Similarly, outcomes for care leavers were acknowledged at Northbrook College's inspection in 2013:

'The college has outstanding provision for groups of students often marginalised or vulnerable within the community. The inclusive nature of the college's enrolment policy ensures that, for example, unemployed adults gain access to relevant employability training and that young people in the care of the local authority gain valuable experience of independent living such as travelling to and from the college on their own.'

[Dumfries and Galloway College](#) was able to secure funding to enable tracking and monitoring of care leavers' pathways:

'The collaboration of social services and the college secured a bid from the Funding Council for 2 years resulting in the Go Further Project which aimed to improve the participation, retention, achievement and attainment of looked after young people and care leavers. The project also aimed to formalise the partnership arrangements for referral identification, tracking, monitoring and supporting looked after young people'.

At Hugh Baird College, all staff are committed to supporting care leavers, including Governors:

'The Quality Mark has enabled staff to understand that everyone has a duty of care towards Looked After Children and Care Leavers, and illustrates the college's commitment from the Governors through to front-line delivery'.

4.5. 'Collect feedback from care-experienced students and work with the Student Union / Student Association to evaluate the quality of student experience and the impact of college procedures'

It is important that colleges develop good relationships with the Student Union/Student Association as this is an ideal way of collecting feedback on the learner experience and of finding ways of supporting students from care backgrounds. Student Unions can offer effective formal, informal and peer-focussed support to learners, which is often effective in breaking down barriers and enabling care leavers to feel as though their voices are heard and their views matter.

- **Appoint care leaver champions and develop activities to collect feedback**

From taster days onwards NPTC Group includes care leavers as champions and ambassadors for other care leavers, as sounding boards and in ensuring that they get support. Learner voice is valued highly and young people with a care experience tend to stay in touch.

Amongst many others, Forth Valley College runs focus groups for eliciting feedback. Other colleges, especially smaller ones, collect feedback from learners on an almost daily basis. This enables them to constantly review the impact of the support offered to care leavers.

- **Participation in College Council**

One college reported that care leavers are involved in the College Council - they were not elected as a 'care leaver' but as a student representative and in that role they can bring their experience of care.

4.6. 'Offer mandatory wider staff training across the institution and ensure all relevant staff across the institution are aware of issues relating to the needs of students with a care background'

- **Examples of CPD available**

At the time of writing, there are certified courses available as well as those offering a qualification to raise awareness about the experiences of care leavers and improve practice.

Profile Development and Training in Kent offer a two-hour certified [online course](#) to support educational and social care practitioners to improve the outcomes for young people who are looked after or leaving care and a LASER '[Supporting Young People Leaving Care in Post-16 Education \(QCF\)](#)' Level 3 qualification to enhance and recognise the skills and knowledge of the 'Designated member of staff' in FE and HE institutions responsible for care leavers.

In Scotland, the Centre for Excellence for Looked After Children in Scotland ([CELCIS](#)) offer a [Caring for Vulnerable Children](#) online training course.

- **Catch-all awareness raising activities for staff**

Staff roadshows, breakfasts or inset days characterise the approaches taken to ensuring that all college staff are involved. This approach includes all staff and governors at some level, including non-academic staff, catering managers and estates staff. Similar examples are provided by West Highland College, which is a small college spread across 10 rural sites, but where nevertheless all are known to each other and information is shared readily, to large urban colleges also with multiple sites where people do not necessarily meet each other frequently, such as Hugh Baird College.

- **Innovative approaches**

Dumfries and Galloway College had particular success with 'roving breakfasts' where the staff with responsibility for care leavers went to each department with breakfast rolls and coffee at the start of the day to ensure that all staff were briefed with a good understanding of the needs of students with care experience.

College mergers offer additional opportunities for staff training as all the sets of staff are often brought together during the merger, to be introduced to new ways of working and to adopt a joint approach to a range of issues, including working with looked after young people.

- **Care leavers as a regular agenda item at vulnerable group meetings**

Derby College uses its intranet to promote information internally to staff. This also includes an 'enrichment calendar' of staff training and care leaving issues were included in a recent workshop. The front line intervention team has monthly meetings which include a standard agenda item around vulnerable groups. Staff

have a responsibility to read the updates and look at the moodle and the intranet and to read reminders on emails.

- **Reciprocal Training provided by social care and college staff**

Belfast Metropolitan College has developed a proactive working relationship with the [Belfast Trust](#) (Health and Social Care Trust) in support of students from a care background. The Trust has regular meetings with the college to consider the educational pathways of young people from a care background. They regularly request information on how individual students are progressing. They have also provided training to college staff on meeting the support needs of young people in care and the college has provided their staff with workshops on helping the young people they are working with to look again at education as an option open to them.

4.7. 'Share best practice with colleagues for example through local and regional networks, national organisations, etc'

- **Existing networks**

In England the National Network for the Education of Care Leavers ([NNECL](#)) was established in June 2013 by higher education institutions and national organisations committed to the progression and support of care leavers in higher education. Working together, the network aims to transform the progression of young people in or leaving care into and through further and higher education, by championing the continuous improvement of local practice, multi-agency partnerships and national collaboration.

In Scotland, [CDN](#) run a college network and in Wales there is a college/university network called CLASS CYMRU (Care Leavers Activities and Student Support Cymru) – further information about this network can be requested from Einir Evans – EvansE23@cardiff.ac.uk. The network meets regularly to develop collaborative approaches to address the needs of looked after children and care leavers entering further and higher education, identifying potential barriers facing these students, and sharing good practice. Also in Northern Ireland there is a FE/HE group which consists of representatives from all FE and HE institutions and the Health and Social Care Board.

- **Active participation in local/regional networks**

Many colleges play an active role in networks; for example Wakefield College reported positively about the network HEART (Higher Education Access Rewarding Transforming) they are involved in, which works across West Yorkshire. This network includes specific work to support care leavers and foster carers and includes HEIs and FE colleges along with local authorities and other stakeholders. This kind of forum represents an excellent method of sharing good practice and developing better relationships across the many agencies whose work needs to be coherent and where possible jointly co-ordinated.

- **Raising awareness for policy makers, researchers and practitioners through free or low cost conferences**

All colleges highlighted the importance of affordable national conferences, such as those organised by [The Care Leavers Foundation](#) and [NIACE](#). The National Network for the Education of Care Leavers ([NNECL](#)) runs a free annual event for practitioners in England. In Scotland, there is an [annual conference](#) supported by the Scottish Funding Council and organised by the Centre for Excellence for Looked After Children in Scotland ([CELCIS](#)). [Action on Access](#) also runs conferences on Widening Participation and Access which include care leavers as a learner cohort.

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CONCLUSION

'My message to learning providers is that they should always listen to the young person to hear their story.'

Designated member of staff

Colleges are complex and varied organisations. Some are large multi-faceted businesses; some are small and single focused; some are rural covering very large areas of the country. So support for care leavers and looked after young people, needs to be placed in context – they may be a small part of any student cohort. We need to recognise that, while all colleges, and staff within colleges, are motivated by wanting the best for all their students, there are other motivators that influence their provision and priorities, including inspection and income targets attached to successfully retaining and progressing as many learners as possible.

We have drawn out of our work, our conversations with staff and care leaver learners a number of conclusions. We hope these conclusions will enable staff to develop, improve or implement processes to ensure those who are, or have been looked after, can access college provision, stay in learning and progress. The best practice shows all or most of the following features:

1. Within policies and strategies, looked after young people/care leavers (LAYP/CL) are recognized as a distinct cohort with often unique and individual support needs within the wider vulnerable students group. This should be supported by regular reporting and review of policies and strategy, with input from students.
2. All staff within a college need some awareness of what a looked after young person/care leaver is, the typical issues they may be facing and the support they need. Good CPD includes the development of networks and access to national training opportunities.
3. Regional and national structures offer an effective way of networking, of bringing together different relevant agencies and stakeholders, and represent a proactive method of sharing good practice and developing relationships across many agencies and geographical areas.
4. A named and accessible member of staff is responsible for supporting care leavers. This individual typically has the explicit backing from the Principal and senior management team (SMT). The named member of staff may be from the teaching staff, a pastoral worker or a member of the support team.
5. Clear processes and procedures for engaging and supporting care leavers, which are understood by all staff. Such processes and procedures are typically reinforced by clear marketing activities, publicity, use of social media and of

printed matter, which are not only part of the initial recruitment procedure but accessible throughout the year.

6. Access to immediate support – whenever and however the care leaver needs it, and around any issues or difficulties that arise, such as financial, academic, connected to home life or to do with health issues. Individual staff members are unlikely to be able to directly offer the full range of support that may be required – but they must know where to go and how to get information quickly.
7. Colleges need to work in collaboration with local authorities/Health and Social Care Trusts, schools, and other organisations in order to identify, track and monitor care leavers. This should go hand in hand with efficient methods of data collection internally and externally to feed into reporting processes.

Support for care leavers and looked after young people to access learning, have a positive experience and achieve their potential in colleges is driven from Principal level downwards and involves all staff members working together across departments and responsibilities.

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GLOSSARY OF TERMS

This glossary provides short explanations of terms that are associated with care leavers, the care system and Further Education colleges. The terms here are those used in England and may vary slightly across the other 3 nations.

Designated person/member of staff

This is the person in a college who has responsibility for helping care leavers with any curricula or wellbeing issues. This person can help the care leaver themselves or signpost them to other sources of support. Each college has its own definition of who should undertake this role, for example, it could be a member of staff who has pastoral care as their role, a subject teacher or a member of the additional learning support team. The college should make sure that all care leavers are aware of who this person is, how they can help and how to contact them at any time.

Pathway Plan

The Pathway Plan is drawn up for a young person living in care at 15/16 and then revisited at 18 by the young person's Personal Adviser. This is a vehicle for Social Workers to talk to the young person they are responsible for about their current situation and plans for the future. It covers a range of topics including finding somewhere to live, what kind of learning or work they would like to engage with, their health, their relationships and support mechanisms, their own identity, financial support available and how they will support themselves. The Pathway Plan should be revisited at least every 6 months but preferably whenever the young person needs support.

Personal Adviser

This person is appointed by the local authority at 17/18 to support the young person leaving care to make choices about learning and work and to signpost to further support externally. They should review the Pathway Plan at this point. The Personal Adviser currently can be a trusted member of the young person's family or a friend but is more commonly employed by the Local Authority in this role. In some cases the Social Worker responsible for the young person at 16 continues as Personal Adviser.

Personal Education Plan (PEP)

This is the plan drawn up for learning at school. These plans are designed to establish clear targets and actions to respond effectively to each child's needs and provide a continuous record of their achievements.

In addition, a Personal Education Plan is an opportunity to listen to children, record their hopes and worries and clearly show their stated aspirations. Ideally, the PEP should feed into the development of a Pathway Plan at 16.

Virtual School / Virtual Head Teachers

All the children looked after by a local authority in England are classed as pupils in a Virtual School. The Virtual School will have a virtual head teacher. This is someone appointed by the local authority to promote the educational achievement of all the children looked after by that council. The children are on a 'virtual' school roll, even though they are physically spread across the schools in an area.

The idea is that each local council employs an experienced teacher to oversee the educational progress of all children under the care of that local authority. A single school may have only one or two children in care on their registers and be unfamiliar with the issues.

The Virtual Head will have the specialist knowledge to provide extra support to designated teachers. They also have a 'bigger picture' remit to work with all professionals in the Children's Services department of the council and with all schools in the area on initiatives to promote the education of children in care.

PRIORITIES IN POLICY, PRACTICE AND RESEARCH

Evidence shows that young people who have been in local authority care achieve disproportionately poor outcomes at school, and in further and higher education, compared to their peers. This in turn has negative consequences which can affect care leavers' opportunities and experiences throughout their lives. However, NIACE's research and the experience of the Buttle UK Quality Mark demonstrates that with effective targeted support and encouragement, care leavers do succeed in further education and progress to higher education with similar success.

This short paper was developed from NIACE's work with Buttle UK, to disseminate good practice emerging from the Buttle UK Quality Mark for Care Leavers in the UK. NIACE is working to ensure that the learning and skills system and the wider support infrastructure enables young people who have been in local authority care to aim high, fulfil their potential and lead full and active adult lives. This paper presents a series of priorities for future action and work, which NIACE believes will make a difference in enabling all care leavers to achieve the outcomes they deserve.

POLICY

A. NATIONAL INQUIRY

Government should support and launch a national inquiry into post-16 learning transitions for care leavers. The inquiry should link closely with the All Party Parliamentary Group for Looked After Children. The inquiry should collect and review a range of evidence and submissions including current practices, partnerships and collaboration; impact of effective practice on care leavers and other stakeholders; what works; and key challenges. The output of the inquiry should include a series of recommendations and actions to improve care leavers' transitions in post-16 learning.

B. ESTABLISHMENT OF A NATIONAL POLICY FORUM FOR CARE LEAVERS' ACCESS TO LEARNING AND WORK

A cross-government and stakeholder forum should be established to consider ways in which national policy could be more effective in supporting care leavers to engage in learning and work and to drive forward policy change.

PRACTICE

C. DEVELOPING AND SUSTAINING GOOD PRACTICE

All further education colleges should have access to targeted training and CPD opportunities to improve the support they offer to care leavers. This should be both in-house and external. It should involve networking with other providers and support agencies to build on and learn from existing good practice that has been

developed within the sector. We recommend that agencies such as the Education and Training Foundation include support for care leavers as part of their staff development strategies, and that other sector bodies, such as the Association of Colleges, take an active role in supporting colleges to learn from existing good practice and develop their own processes and policies in relation to care leavers.

D. REGIONAL NETWORKS

Government should support the establishment of networks to enable effective sharing of good practice and joined up work at regional level by a range of stakeholders, including FE colleges, local authorities, third sector agencies and other support services.

E. TRANSITION PLANNING

College staff and local authority personal advisers should meet with individual care leavers, on a regular basis, to ensure a smooth transition between a young person's Personal Education Plan and the formation of the Pathway Plan at 16, in terms of understanding options and planning for further education.

RESEARCH

F. VOCATIONAL LEARNING

Research should be undertaken to understand care leavers' experiences of vocational learning options, such as apprenticeships and traineeships and to identify how this group can be effectively supported to follow successful vocational pathways.